Newsletter of Deccan Birders (formerly Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh)
New Series Volume 17 Number 2 February 2020

Details of the events for February & March 2020 are given below:

FEBRUARY 2020

FIELD TRIP-1: Sunday, 2nd February 2020: Shamirpet Lake. Meeting point: Opp. Mangatrai Pearls, Punjagutta, 6.15AM. Trip Coordinator: JVD Moorty (Mobile: 9849470411)

Shamirpet has always been a reliable birding site offering good sightings of water birds. The grasslands surrounding the lake too usually give a good number of small grassland birds.

HSBC Hyderabad BirdRace 2020: Sunday, 23rd February 2020. Coordinator: Srikanth Bhamidipati (Mobile: 9738840070)

This is the 11th edition of the Hyderabad BirdRace, an annual event where bird lovers form teams and involve in a dawn to dusk frenzy of spotting and recording bird species in and around the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad. The event culminates in a grand dinner followed by awarding the participant teams mementos and listening to their birding experiences. The gathering at the end of the day provides an excellent opportunity for interaction with some of the renowned experts in the field as well. Do participate in big numbers. Please note: the event is open to non-members also, so please bring your children, friends, colleagues, or anyone else whom you would like to introduce to the world of birding!

MARCH 2020

FIELD TRIP-1: 14th-15th March 2020: Pakhal Lake & Wildlife Sanctuary. Meeting point: Telephone Bhavan, Lakdi Ka Pul. Trip Coordinators: Gowthama Poludasu (Mobile: 9440910967); Srikanth Bhamidipati (Mobile: 9738840070).

Pakhal Lake is a man-made lake which is situated 50km from Warangal and about 200km from Hyderabad, and is said to have been built by the Kakatiya Kings. The Lake and Sanctuary, and adjoining teak and bamboo forests, house over 250 bird species as well as the leopard, sambhar, black buck and chinkara.

The convoy will leave from the meeting point at 4.00AM sharp on 14th March 2020. The route is via Musheerabad-Tarnaka-Uppal-Ghatkesar-Warangal. The trip expense is approximately Rs 3000.00 per head, which includes food, accommodation (on triple sharing basis) and transport. Those interested may please confirm participation by paying Rs 1000.00 as advance at the earliest.

FIELD TRIP-2: Sunday, 29th March 2020: Ananthagiri Hills. Meeting point: Punjagutta (opp. Mangatrai Pearls), 6.15AM. Trip Coordinators: Gowthama Poludasu (Mobile: 9440910967); Srikanth Bhamidipati (Mobile: 9738840070).

Besides being a pleasant woodland walk, Ananthagiri has always been very productive from the birding viewpoint, and is a paradise for forest birds. One can see Flycatchers, White-eyes, Chloropsis, Orange-headed Thrush, Nightjars, among others. The Indian Pitta and the Brown Fish Owl have been reported earlier.

Both the local Field Trips would be half-day trips. Carry water and breakfast. As always, we will be car-pooling, so please let the respective coordinators know if you need a ride, and also if you can accommodate any others in your vehicle. Members are requested to wear their Deccan Birders ID cards. Non-members are most welcome; however, they are requested to contribute Rs. 100/- per person to the Deccan Birders kitty. Our new T-Shirts and Caps will be available for sale; T-Shirts are Rs. 450/- each and Caps are Rs. 250/-. Also, as always, please avoid plastic carry bags and containers.

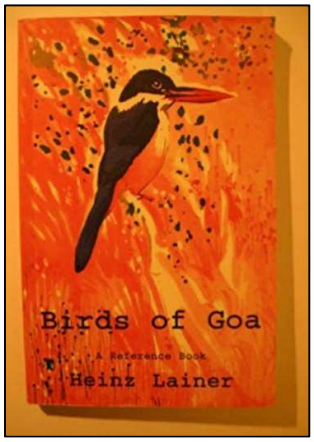
INDOOR MEETING: Talk on "Pygmy Hog, the world's smallest and rarest pig: An insight into its biology and conservation" by Deepanwita Purohit. Tuesday, 17th March 2020, 6.00PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443/23350040)

Deepanwita is a conservation biologist, currently working as a postdoctoral fellow at Laboratory for Conservation of Endangered Species (LaCONES), Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB). She will speak about the critically endangered suid, Pygmy Hog, its behavioural ecology in the wild and the conservation breeding program being initiated for its recovery.

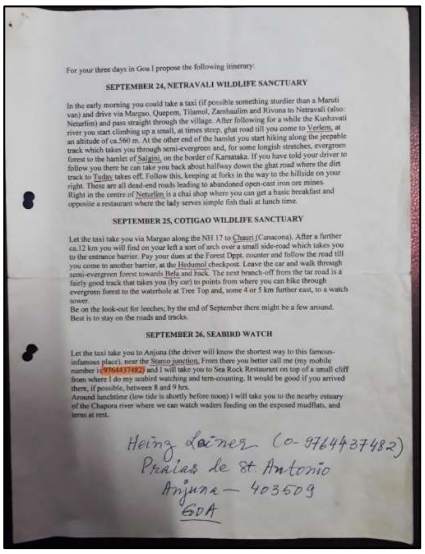
OBITUARY

HEINZ LAINER
09.08.1943 – 09.02.2020

Heinz was of German origin and had settled down in Goa a very long time ago. He had a passion for birding and was therefore rightly referred to as 'Birdlainer'. He was a birder par excellence and was well known in our Indian birding community. He did intensive birding surveys in and around Goa and had authored the book, 'Birds of Goa', an authentic and comprehensive record of bird species in that region.



It was in September 2010 that a few members of our Society decided to go to Goa for a birding trip. I therefore requested Aasheesh for an introduction to his good friend Heinz, with the intention of approaching him for help with an itinerary. Heinz replied promptly and asked me to send him my postal address. Within a week, he couriered me a detailed itinerary, including meticulously drawn hand sketches with amazing details showing places to visit, roads and routes to take, and even where to eat!


For your three days in Goa I propose the following itinerary:

SEPTEMBER 24, NETRAVALI WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

In the early morning you could take a taxi (if possible something sturdier than a Maruti van) and drive via Margao, Quepem, Tilamol, Zanhaalim and Rivona to Netravali (also: Netarlim) and pass straight through the village. After following for a while the Kushavati river you start climbing up a small, at times steep, ghat road till you come to Verlem, at an altitude of ca.560 m. At the other end of the hamlet you start hiking along the jeepable track which takes you through semi-evergreen and, for some longish stretches, evergreen forest to the hamlet of Salgini, on the border of Karnataka. If you have told your driver to follow you there he can take you back about halfway down the ghat road where the dirt track to Tudav takes off. Follow this, keeping at forks in the way to the hillside on your right. These are all dead-end roads leading to abandoned open-cast iron ore mines. Right in the centre of Netarlim is a chai shop where you can get a basic breakfast and opposite a restaurant where the lady serves simple fish thali at lunch time.

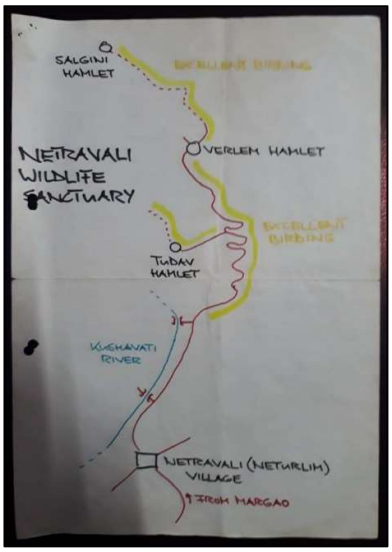
SEPTEMBER 25, COTIGAO WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

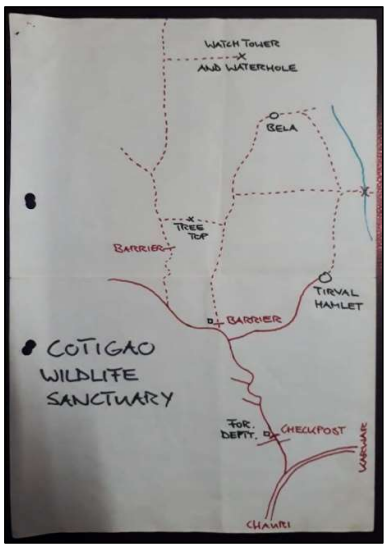
Let the taxi take you via Margao along the NH 17 to Chauri (Canacona). After a further ca.12 km you will find on your left a sort of arch over a small side-road which takes you to the entrance barrier. Pay your dues at the Forest Dept. counter and follow the road till you come to another barrier, at the Hedaravl checkpost. Leave the car and walk through semi-evergreen forest towards Bela and back. The next branch-off from the tar road is a fairly good track that takes you (by car) to points from where you can hike through evergreen forest to the waterhole at Tree Top and, some 4 or 5 km further east, to a watch tower.
Be on the look-out for leeches; by the end of September there might be a few around. Best is to stay on the roads and tracks.

SEPTEMBER 26, SEABIRD WATCH

Let the taxi take you to Anjuna (the driver will know the shortest way to this famous-infamous place), near the Starco junction. From there you better call me (my mobile number is 9764437482) and I will take you to Sea Rock Restaurant on top of a small cliff from where I do my seabird watching and tern-counting. It would be good if you arrived there, if possible, between 8 and 9 hrs.
Around lunchtime (low tide is shortly before noon) I will take you to the nearby estuary of the Chapora river where we can watch waders feeding on the exposed mudflats, and terns at rest.

Heinz Lainer (☎ 9764437482)
Prainha de St. Antonio
Anjuna – 403509
GOA





Our trip was finalized, and fifteen of us went to Goa and, as advised by him, met him at Anjuna beach on the morning of 24th September 2010. He was waiting for us with a ready smile. After introductions and exchange of pleasantries, he took us to a couple of good birding spots and then, after a hearty breakfast, we bid him good bye. For the next three days we were on our own, following his instructions. Before leaving Goa I called him to express our thanks for all he had done for us. He said he would be visiting Hyderabad in the near future. But alas, he never did.

We shall all miss the "Birdman of Goa" who gave so much to Indian ornithology. Let us pray that his soul rests in peace. I am sure he is now content and happy, rubbing shoulders with the Birds of Paradise.

- Shafaat Ulla

‘SKUA’RING THE ARABIAN WATERS

Trip Report – Goa Pelagic Trip, November 22-24, 2019

Rama Sarvani, Deepanwita Purohit & Sravan Kumar R

The group during the Pelagic tour (Photo courtesy: Srikanth Bhamidipati)

INTRODUCTION

Rama Sarvani

I am filled with gratitude towards the organizers of Deccan Birders for planning the Pelagic tour. I could not have asked for better company to travel and bird with. We greeted each other at Vasco Bus Depot and talked about the birds we saw *en route*, which was not very many as it was a closed sleeper bus. But I did manage to spot Brahminy Kites (*Haliastur indus*) circling above us. There were approximately 40-50 of them. Sravan, however, saw a few Hornbills and some Egrets on the way. After the topsy turvy ride, we finally entered Konkan.

Though I’ve never been to the northern part of the Western Ghats, the surroundings looked pretty familiar to me. It brought back a lot of memories from my trip to Valparai earlier this year. The Western Ghats are supposedly older than the Himalayas, stretching approximately 1600km, positioned parallel to the west coast of the sub-continent.

After freshening up at our accommodation, we got our designated hired scooters with chauffeurs! On the first day of the trip, since the morning session was already gone, we went birding along Morjim Beach. This beach, known for its tranquil and calm ambience, is also a nesting site for the Olive Ridley Sea Turtles. Also known as “Little Russia”, this is one of the most visited beaches in North Goa after the Baga Beach. More on this beach and our birding experiences during the trip follow below.

DAY 1 – MORJIM BEACH

Deepanwita Purohit

When I first heard of ‘Pelagic Birding’, it evoked a sense of curiosity in me. The word ‘pelagic’ is derived from the Greek word for ‘open sea’. Birds that spend most of their life on open sea and venture ashore only for breeding are called pelagic birds, a rarity in terrestrial habitats. Thus, a trip to Goa to explore this unique avian group and other fauna amid the vastness of the Arabian Sea, seemed like a ‘never to miss’ opportunity. With this common goal, our team of 13 birders arrived at Goa on the morning of 22nd Nov, hoping for some unique birding experience over the next 72 hours. With the pelagic trip scheduled on 23rd, we had a day in hand to explore the other nearby habitats.

Topographically Goa is a part of the Konkan region, which is an escarpment rising up to Western Ghats and is a biodiversity hotspot. One can expect a rich floral and faunal diversity here. We checked into a hotel where the rooms had balconies overlooking a small patch of vegetation - a perfect spot for some casual birding. After we settled down in our respective rooms, we got hold of our binoculars for a quick scan of the surroundings.

Grey-headed Bulbul (Photo: Umesh Mani)

What caught our attention first was the call of a Grey-headed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus priocephalus*) and the next moment we spotted it perched on a tree. What a start!

Scaly-breasted Munia (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Soon after, a small flock of Scaly-breasted Munias (*Lonchura punctulata*) arrived on a roof top next to our building in search of some insects from an algal bloom. The other notable sightings from the balcony were Small Minivets (*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*), Greenish Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochiloides*), Red-whiskered Bulbul (*Pycnonotus jocosus*) and Chestnut-tailed Starling (*Sturnia malabarica*) to name a few.

Chestnut-tailed Starling (Photo: Umesh Mani)

After a quick refreshment, we headed to Turtle Beach in Morjim, which is located in the Northern bank of Chapora river estuary. Along the mountainous terrain facing the boundless sea, we spotted White-bellied Sea Eagles (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*) and Brahminy Kites gliding across in pursuit of prey. There were also some small water bodies on the way, where Common Sandpipers (*Actitis hypoleucos*) and Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*) could be seen, and some mudflats, which hosted large numbers of Gulls and Terns.

Gulls & Terns on the mudflats (Photo: Sravan Kumar R)

White-bellied Sea Eagle (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Morjim beach is a nesting ground for the Olive Ridley Sea Turtle and home to many resident and migrant birds. We were welcomed by a visual delight of hundreds of migratory Lesser Sand Plovers (*Charadrius mongolus*) walking about in large groups on the warm sand of Morjim.

Lesser Sand Plover flock (Photo: Sravan Kumar R)

Lesser Sand Plover (Photo: Gokul Krishna Addanki)

Brown-headed Gull (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Also seen were Brown-headed Gulls (*Chroicocephalus brunnicephalus*), Black-headed Gulls (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*), River Terns (*Sterna aurantia*) and Gull-billed Terns (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) flying around and scanning the water for food.

Amur Falcon (Photo: Sravan Kumar R)

While a few of us busy playing splashing about in the waves, Sravan spotted an Amur Falcon (*Falco amurensis*) making its journey across the Arabian Sea to Southern Africa. Interestingly, the very next day on the pelagic tour we spotted the dragonflies which the Falcon primarily feeds on during its migration.

DAY 2 – PELAGIC TOUR

Rama Sarvani

We started our trip with a weather update from Siri that charged me up. Sunrise was at 5.00AM. I woke up early because I was excited to venture into the sea. This is the first time in many years that a Pelagic Tour was organized by Deccan Birders and I wanted to make complete use of the time I had. We had been informed that seeing the pelagic birds was a rare sight and I wanted to be all set for a whole day trip without giving in to seasickness. Many of us took the anti-nausea medicine and we embarked on our journey into the sea on our modified fishing vessel.

Gulls following a fishing boat (Photo: Sravan Kumar R)

Black-headed Gull (Photo: Sravan Kumar R)

The sea was calm and as soon as our boat started, the Brown and Black-headed Gulls started following our boat. These birds have learnt over time that fishing boats have fish and they fly in close proximity to the boats. There was a flock always following us even as we went 30-40 km further into the sea.

Arctic Skua (Photo: Dheeraj Chavadi)

My enthusiasm spiked as we spotted the first Arctic Skua (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) about 10 km into the sea. As expected, we saw a few Lesser (*Thalasseus bengalensis*) and Greater Crested Terns (*Thalasseus bergii*) which were following their usual fishing regimen. Though I had not had enough of the Arctic Skuas, I wanted to see some other pelagic species as well, like the Shearwaters, Petrels and, at least, one Booby.

Brown-headed Gull with Conger Eel catch (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Nevertheless, I saw a lot of birds and at one point, when everyone was relaxing, I went to the forward part of the boat with our guide Omkar, who was kind enough to share his knowledge about the birds he saw on some of the earlier pelagic trips and his experiences. He had seen Wilson's, Swinehoe's and even Joaquin's Storm Petrels, hundreds of Humpback Dolphins and also quite a number of whales during his trips. While we were still talking, I suddenly spotted a Skua flying past me. It was the Pomarine Skua (*Stercorarius pomarinus*), another lifer for me.

Pomarine Skua (Photo: Sudhir Moorti)

While my eyes were searching for those species which Omkar had talked about, I somehow realized midway, that I was ignoring some other common birds and moths and also a lot of migrating Crimson Rose butterflies. There was so much activity all of a sudden, that I just couldn't process all of it at once.

Flying Fish (Photo: Umesh Mani)

I saw the 'Flying Fish' also. These marine fish are members of the family Exocoetidae, and are colloquially known as 'flying fish' or 'flying cod'. Though these fish glide long distances, one can never predict when they come out of the water and so it was almost impossible for me to take a single picture. However, to watch them glide over the water was such an amazing feeling. The brilliance with which they glide made me wonder, why do they glide? A little reading up on it later told me that they usually glide to escape from the predators, which, to them, at that moment, was the boat. Though they do not fly like birds, they still 'fly'. There are around 64 species of flying fish globally and 5 of them are seen in Indian waters.

Common Tern (Photo: Umesh Mani)

I realized that one Pelagic birding trip is not enough and the probability of seeing a lot of lifers was very slim. However, watching the same birds, again and again, gave me a new experience each time, because I could see their behavior change when they were getting food from a fishing boat nearby or when they were just floating around on the waters along with the currents, just chilling. It was a sight to behold!

Bottlenose Dolphin (Photo: Sravan Kumar R)

Bottlenose Dolphin (Photo: Umesh Mani)

While returning, we saw some Bottlenose Dolphins and clicked pictures. Their moist skin glistening in the setting sun made this experience exhilarating and a standout memory. What an end to the trip! It will always stay engraved in my memory.

Greater Crested Tern (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Brahminy Kite with catch (Photo: Umesh Mani)

One aspect that I would like to document and bring attention to, is the large quantity of balloons, plastic containers and thermocol pieces floating around. I have heard people saying, "it's just a balloon, release it", but now when I saw this sight, I felt terrible. We must stop and think how balloons and other trash affect lives in the sea.

Western Reef Egret (Photo: Dheeraj Chavadi)

A view of the mudflats (Photo: Sravan Kumar R)

DAY 3 – SOCORRO & SERULA VILLAGES

Sravan Kumar R

A view of Socorro Plateau (Photo: Sravan Kumar R)

Socorro Plateau was once a part of the *communidade* and the larger village of Serula. It is named after its Parish church, the 'Nossa Senhora de Socorro', built in 1667. Socorro is a Portuguese word, meaning 'succour', 'help' or 'relief'. Socorro Plateau is also a known birding hotspot.

Birding on the roadside (Photo: Sravan Kumar R)

On Day-3, eight of us visited the place on for birding. *En route*, turning in from the highway, our team halted for a tea break and for buying some refreshments. We pre-booked our breakfast because of a busy Sunday. Moving ahead for a short distance, a group of White-rumped Munias (*Lonchura striata*) appeared on electric lines, and later moved down to the ground.

White-rumped Munia (Photo: Gokul Krishna Addanki)

A pair of Oriental Magpie Robins (*Copsychus saularis*) was also perched and was making courtship calls. We observed Red-whiskered Bulbuls and White-rumped Munias feeding in the paddy fields. On the opposite side, an Indian Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayii*) perched on a boundary pole and a Yellow Bittern (*Ixobrychus sinensis*) peeped at us through the leaves. Jungle Mynas (*Acridotheres fuscus*) and Brahminy Kites were also recorded. A little ahead, a Pompadour (or) Grey-fronted Green Pigeon (*Treron (pompadora) affinis*) was looking for the ripe fruit on the Singapore Cherry (*Muntingia calabura)* tree. As we walked uphill, we heard the calls of Blue-throated Blue Flycatcher (*Cyornis rubeculoides*) and the Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*) in the thick vegetation.

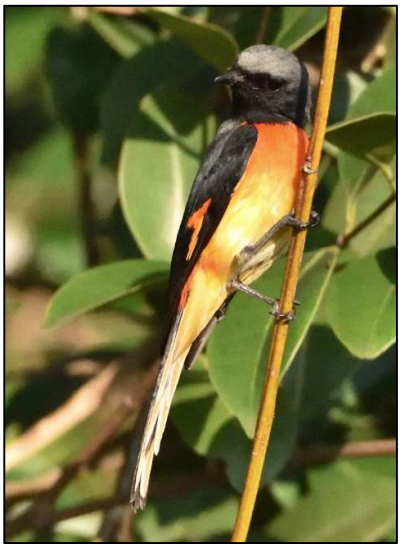
Grey-fronted Green Pigeon
(Photo: Srikanth Bhamidipati)

On reaching the plateau, we were amazed to see a grassland on the rocky terrain. It was very different from the grasslands of Desert National Park in the sandy soils of Rajasthan and Rollapadu grasslands in the red soils of Kurnool district, AP.

Purple Heron (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Part of the team on bikes went ahead for conducting recce about the surrounding habitat. Meanwhile the rest of the group continued to search for birds and butterflies in the grasslands. The streams in the gullies of grasslands form a perfect niche for amphibians and other aquatic insects. Ashy-crowned Sparrow Larks (*Eremopterix griseus*), White-browed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus luteolus*), Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*), Purple Sunbird (*Cinnyris asiaticus*), Purple-rumped Sunbird (*Leptocoma zeylonica*), Spotted Dove (*Stigmatopelia chinensis*), Asian Pied Starling (*Gracupica contra*), Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*), Common Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*), Small Minivet, Nilgiri Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum concolor*), Tree Pipit (*Anthus trivialis*), Eurasian (or) Common Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*), Asian Koel (*Eudynamys scolopaceus*) and Montagu's Harrier (*Circus pygargus*) were recorded before we decided to 'break the fast'.

Eurasian (or Common) Cuckoo (Photo: Sravan Kumar R)



Small Minivet (Photo: Sravan Kumar R)

Towards the end of breakfast, a Booted Eagle (*Hieraaetus pennatus*) came soaring above us and perched on a tree nearby. From the photographs clicked, we found it was blind in one eye.

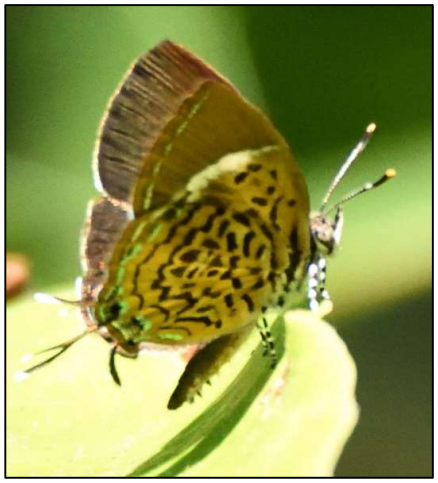
Booted Eagle (Photo: Sravan Kumar R)

Our birding continued till we reached the other edge of the plateau from where we could see a big water body and a spreading concrete jungle at the foothill.

Peacock Pansy (Photo: Sravan Kumar R)

Glassy Tiger (Photo: Gokul Krishna Addanki)

While walking down the inclined road, we added Verditer Flycatcher (*Eumyias thalassinus*) and Crimson-backed Sunbird (*Leptocoma minima*) to the list. The habitat seemed favourable for many butterflies; Southern Birdwing, Monkey Puzzle, etc.



Monkey Puzzle (Photo: Sravan Kumar R)

Southern Birdwing (Photo: Sravan Kumar R)

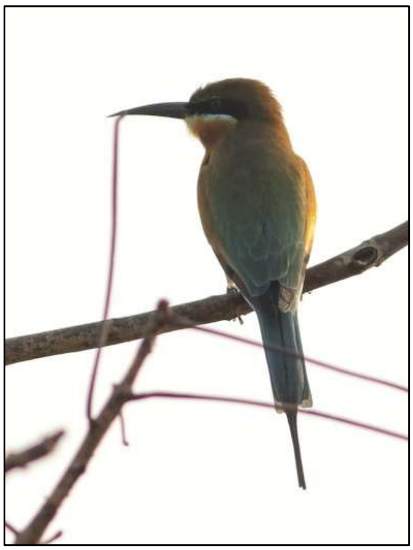
The complete list of birds seen during the trip is given below:

Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name
1	Lesser Whistling-Duck	*Dendrocygna javanica*	36	Whiskered Tern	*Chlidonias hybrida*
2	Ruddy Shelduck	*Tadorna ferruginea*	37	Common Tern	*Sterna hirundo*
3	Gadwall	*Mareca strepera*	38	River Tern	*Sterna aurantia*
4	Indian Spot-billed Duck	*Anas poecilorhyncha*	39	Great Crested Tern	*Thalasseus bergii*
5	Indian Peafowl	*Pavo cristatus*	40	Lesser Crested Tern	*Thalasseus bengalensis*
6	Little Grebe	*Tachybaptus ruficollis*	41	Asian Openbill	*Anastomus oscitans*
7	Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon)	*Columba livia*	42	Little Cormorant	*Microcarbo niger*
8	Nilgiri Wood Pigeon	*Columba elphinstonii*	43	Yellow Bittern	*Ixobrychus sinensis*
9	Eurasian Collared Dove	*Streptopelia decaocto*	44	Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*
10	Spotted Dove	*Streptopelia chinensis*	45	Purple Heron	*Ardea purpurea*
11	Grey-fronted Green Pigeon	*Treron affinis*	46	Great Egret	*Ardea alba*
12	Greater Coucal	*Centropus sinensis*	47	Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta*
13	Asian Koel	*Eudynamys scolopaceus*	48	Western Reef Egret	*Egretta gularis*
14	Indian Swiftlet	*Aerodramus unicolor*	49	Cattle Egret	*Bubulcus ibis*
15	Asian Palm Swift	*Cypsiurus balasiensis*	50	Indian Pond Heron	*Ardeola grayii*
16	Eurasian Coot	*Fulica atra*	51	Glossy Ibis	*Plegadis falcinellus*
17	Gray-headed Swamphen	*Porphyrio poliocephalus*	52	Black-headed Ibis	*Threskiornis melanocephalus*
18	Black-winged Stilt	*Himantopus himantopus*	53	Oriental Honey-buzzard	*Pernis ptilorhynchus*
19	Pacific Golden Plover	*Pluvialis fulva*	54	Booted Eagle	*Hieraaetus pennatus*
20	Red-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus indicus*	55	Montagu's Harrier	*Circus pygargus*
21	Lesser Sand Plover	*Charadrius mongolus*	56	Black Kite	*Milvus migrans*
22	Kentish Plover	*Charadrius alexandrinus*	57	Brahminy Kite	*Haliastur indus*
23	Common Sandpiper	*Actitis hypoleucos*	58	White-bellied Sea Eagle	*Haliaeetus leucogaster*
24	Common Greenshank	*Tringa nebularia*	59	Barn Owl	*Tyto alba*
25	Wood Sandpiper	*Tringa glareola*	60	Spotted Owlet	*Athene brama*
26	Common Redshank	*Tringa totanus*	61	Eurasian Hoopoe	*Upupa epops*
27	Small Pratincole	*Glareola lactea*	62	Common Kingfisher	*Alcedo atthis*
28	Pomarine Skua	*Stercorarius pomarinus*	63	White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*
29	Arctic Skua	*Stercorarius parasiticus*	64	Pied Kingfisher	*Ceryle rudis*
30	Long-tailed Skua	*Stercorarius longicaudus*	65	Green Bee-eater	*Merops orientalis*
31	Slender-billed Gull	*Chroicocephalus genei*	66	Blue-tailed Bee-eater	*Merops philippinus*
32	Black-headed Gull	*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*	67	Indian Roller	*Coracias benghalensis*
33	Brown-headed Gull	*Chroicocephalus brunnicephalus*	68	Coppersmith Barbet	*Psilopogon haemacephalus*
34	Lesser Black-backed Gull (Heuglin's Gull)	*Larus fuscus heuglini*	69	Brown-headed Barbet	*Psilopogon zeylanicus*
35	Gull-billed Tern	*Gelochelidon nilotica*	70	Black-rumped Flameback	*Dinopium benghalense*

Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name
71	Amur Falcon	*Falco amurensis*	97	Jungle Babbler	*Turdoides striata*
72	Rose-ringed Parakeet	*Psittacula krameri*	98	Yellow-billed Babbler	*Turdoides affinis*
73	Plum-headed Parakeet	*Psittacula cyanocephala*	99	Rosy Starling	*Pastor roseus*
74	Orange Minivet	*Pericrocotus flammeus*	100	Chestnut-tailed Starling	*Sturnia malabarica*
75	Indian Golden Oriole	*Oriolus kundoo*	101	Malabar Starling	*Sturnia blythii*
76	Black-hooded Oriole	*Oriolus xanthornus*	102	Common Myna	*Acridotheres tristis*
77	Common Iora	*Aegithina tiphia*	103	Jungle Myna	*Acridotheres fuscus*
78	Black Drongo	*Dicrurus macrocercus*	104	Asian Brown Flycatcher	*Muscicapa dauurica*
79	Ashy Drongo	*Dicrurus leucophaeus*	105	Blue-throated Flycatcher	*Cyornis rubeculoides*
80	Bay-backed Shrike	*Lanius vittatus*	106	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	*Cyornis tickelliae*
81	Rufous Treepie	*Dendrocitta vagabunda*	107	Verditer Flycatcher	*Eumyias thalassinus*
82	House Crow	*Corvus splendens*	108	Pale-billed Flowerpecker	*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*
83	Large-billed Crow	*Corvus macrorhynchos*	109	Nilgiri Flowerpecker	*Dicaeum concolor*
84	Rufous-tailed Lark	*Ammomanes phoenicura*	110	Crimson-backed Sunbird	*Leptocoma minima*
85	Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark	*Eremopterix griseus*	111	Purple Sunbird	*Cinnyris asiaticus*
86	Oriental Skylark	*Alauda gulgula*	112	Little Spiderhunter	*Arachnothera longirostra*
87	Common Tailorbird	*Orthotomus sutorius*	113	White-rumped Munia	*Lonchura striata*
88	Ashy Prinia	*Prinia socialis*	114	Scaly-breasted Munia	*Lonchura punctulata*
89	Barn Swallow	*Hirundo rustica*	115	House Sparrow	*Passer domesticus*
90	Wire-tailed Swallow	*Hirundo smithii*	116	White-browed Wagtail	*Motacilla maderaspatensis*
91	Grey-headed Bulbul	*Brachypodius priocephalus*	117	Tawny Pipit	*Anthus campestris*
92	Red-vented Bulbul	*Pycnonotus cafer*	118	Tree Pipit	*Anthus trivialis*
93	Red-whiskered Bulbul	*Pycnonotus jocosus*	119	Siberian Stonechat	*Saxicola maurus*
94	White-browed Bulbul	*Pycnonotus luteolus*	120	Red-headed Bunting	*Emberiza bruniceps*
95	Greenish Warbler	*Phylloscopus trochiloides*	121	Chestnut-shouldered Petronia	*Gymnoris xanthocollis*
96	Rufous Babbler	*Turdoides subrufa*	122	Spangled Drongo	*Dicrurus hottentottus*

Some other photos taken during the trip:

Siberian Stonechat (Photo: Umesh Mani)



Blue-tailed Bee-eater (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Green Bee-eater (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Spangled Drongo (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Red-headed Bunting (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Chestnut-shouldered Petronia
(Photo: Umesh Mani)

Coppersmith Barbet
(Photo: Umesh Mani)

Jungle Babbler
(Photo: Srikanth Bhamidipati)

Black Drongo (Photo: Umesh Mani)

* * *

Snippet: A Spicy Discovery

Contributed by: Shafaat Ulla

When citizens of Aylesbury, England, found a large orange bird that was having trouble flying in early July, they thought they'd discovered an exotic creature in peril. Upon bringing it to a wildlife hospital, though, they found out it was the animal's bold behaviour that had led to its bold colour: The distressed bird was a seagull that had managed to get itself covered in curry. Seagulls are inquisitive by nature and are known to put themselves in similarly spicy situations. Thankfully, a couple of baths returned it to its naturally unseasoned state.

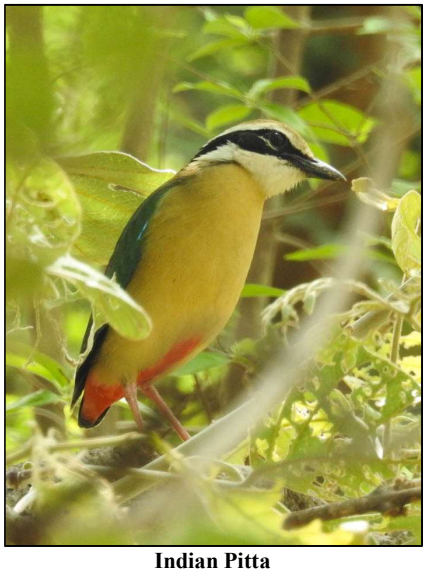
(This article appeared in
The Reader's Digest, February 2020)

Report: Mangar Bani, New Delhi

Text and photos: Sita Susarla

Crested Bunting

One of the birding hotspots in the Delhi NCR region that we have visited half-a-dozen times in the past few months, is the hundred-hectare Mangar forest located in the Faridabad district of Haryana. It is called Mangar Bani in the local Haryanvi dialect. The Mangar forest represents the last remains of the Aravalli forest and the vegetation is mainly comprised of Dhau (*Anogeissus pendula*), Palash (*Butea monosperma*) and Ber (*Ziziphus mauritiana*). The forest is also home to arid-region trees like *Kareel* (*Capparis decidua*), Kair and *Roheda* (*Tecomella undulata*). The 700-year old local Gujjar community believes in a legendary 'Gudariya Baba', whose spirit is believed to curse anybody who dares to harm the forest in any way. The forest is therefore well preserved, enchanting and a birder's delight.



Indian Pitta

Mangar Bani is the summer abode of Himalayan birds like Indian Pitta *(Pitta brachyura),* Crested Bunting *(Emberiza lathami*), Black-headed Cuckooshrike (*Lalage melanoptera*) and Marshall's Iora (*Aegithina nigrolutea*) to name a few. The Indian Pitta is known to nest here every summer and so is the Crested Bunting. Known by the name *Navrang*, the Pitta is a beautifully coloured bird and the two-note call reverberates across the forest during the breeding season. The persistent loud calls help birders to locate the bird easily in this season. Otherwise the Pitta is a very elusive bird and prefers to perch on trees with broad leaves to conceal itself. The Dhau tree probably is its favourite. Even while foraging for food a thick undergrowth habitat is preferred.

The Crested Bunting, locally called Yuvaraj, is spotted near Mohit's farm, situated a few kilometres from the forest area. Unlike the Pitta it is not perturbed by human presence and is easy to photograph. Its preferred habitat is the steep rocky slopes and open cultivation of Mangar village.

Black-headed Cuckooshrike

Common Woodshrike

The Black-headed Cuckooshrike, Grey-throated Martin (*Riparia chinensis*), Marshall's Iora, Common Woodshrike (*Tephrodornis pondicerianus*) and the White-browed Fantail (*Rhipidura aureola*) are the other beautiful birds that adorn the forest. The Fantail was spotted in the open, happily bathing in a puddle of freshly collected rainwater, proudly displaying its fan-like tail while the other birds looked at it in awe.

White-browed Fantail

The Marshall's Iora, also known as White-tailed Iora, kept calling from the canopy above us. The Black-headed Cuckooshrike too was perched on the higher branches of the trees and would call occasionally. The resident Chestnut-shouldered Petronia (*Gymnoris xanthocollis*), or the Yellow-throated Sparrow, can be seen in large numbers everywhere in the forest along with House Sparrows. The Grey-throated Martin is also endemic to this region.

Come the month of July the beautiful Jacobin Cuckoo, heralder of the monsoons as per our ancient culture, visits the forest along with Grey-bellied Cuckoo, and the two are welcomed by their resident cousin, the Common Hawk Cuckoo.

During one of our visits, a fellow birder drew our attention to the calls of the Eurasian Cuckoo. Unfortunately we could not see it, because at some places the canopy of trees was such that standing underneath it you can hardly see the tree tops. However, it was as though we were in Cuckoo-land, listening to four different Cuckoos all calling at the same time. The Indian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus kundoo*), the Asian Paradise-flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*), the Black and White-bellied Drongos (*Dicrurus macrocercus* and *D. caerulescens* respectively) and Rufous Treepies (*Dendrocitta vagabunda*) seem to constitute a bird wave as they were always spotted in the vicinity of each other in this forest.

Grey-breasted Prinia

One interesting feature of birds in Mangar is that each species seems to have an area earmarked for itself and when you visit the forest in the next season, you can easily locate the bird you want to see at the same location. The forest being at the edge of the village there is also plenty of food available for the resident and migrant birds. On Big Bird Day in February 2019 we sighted the majestic migrant raptor, the Steppe Eagle (*Aquila nipalensis*). There were two of them scouting for prey when two Egyptian Vultures joined them. The Steppe Eagle is a winter visitor to north and central India while the Egyptian Vulture is endemic to this region. Booted Eagle (*Hieraatus pennatus*), Black Eagle (*Ictinaetus malayensis*) and Bonelli's Eagle (*Aquila fasciata*) are some of the other raptors that are regularly seen here. Birders from Delhi and surrounding areas often visit Mangar Bani to sight raptors.

Plain Martin

Details of birds seen during different months are given below:

Birds spotted in June

Sl. No.	Species Name	Sl. No.	Species Name	Sl. No.	Species Name
1	Indian Peafowl	17	Coppersmith Barbet	33	Grey-throated Martin
2	Grey Francolin	18	Brown-headed Barbet	34	Red-vented Bulbul
3	Rock Pigeon	19	Black-rumped Flameback	35	Yellow-eyed Babbler
4	Eurasian Collared Dove	20	Rose-ringed Parakeet	36	Large Grey Babbler
5	Red Collared Dove	21	Indian Pitta	37	Jungle Babbler
6	Laughing Dove	22	Indian Golden Oriole	38	Brahminy Starling
7	Yellow-footed Green Pigeon	23	Common Woodshrike	39	Common Myna
8	Jacobin Cuckoo	24	White-browed Fantail	40	Indian Robin
9	Asian Koel	25	Black Drongo	41	Oriental Magpie Robin
10	Common Hawk Cuckoo	26	Bay-backed Shrike	42	Pied Bushchat
11	Egyptian Vulture	27	Black-headed Cuckooshrike	43	Purple Sunbird
12	Black Kite	28	Rufoue Treepie	44	Chestnut-shouldered Petronia
13	Spotted Owlet	29	House Crow	45	Eurasian Hoopoe
14	Indian Grey Hornbill	30	Ashy Prinia	46	Cattle Egret
15	White-throated Kingfisher	31	Plain Prinia	47	Greater Coucal
16	Green Bee-eater	32	Grey-breasted Prinia	48	Spotted Owlet

Birds spotted in July

Sl. No.	Species Name	Sl. No.	Species Name	Sl. No.	Species Name
49	Grey-bellied Cuckoo	54	Oriental White-eye	59	Common Tailorbird
50	Eurasian Cuckoo	55	Red-whiskered Bulbul	60	Indian Paradise-flycatcher
51	Indian Thick-knee	56	Asian Pied Starling	61	Red-wattled Lapwing
52	Shikra	57	Marshall's Iora	62	Indian Silverbill
53	Wire-tailed Swallow	58	Brown Rockchat		

Birds spotted in October

Sl. No.	Species Name
63	Bluethroat
64	Black Eagle
65	Eurasian Hobby

Birds spotted in February

Sl. No.	Species Name	Sl. No.	Species Name
66	Yellow-wattled Lapwing	71	Black Redstart
67	Steppe Eagle	72	Small Minivet
68	Bonelli's Eagle	73	Lesser Whitethroat
69	Common Kestrel	74	Cinereous Tit
70	Plum-headed Parakeet		

* * *

Report: Spotted Owlets in Aziznagar, Hyderabad

Text and photos: Dr Jairamchander Pingle

The Spotted Owlet (*Athene brama*) is a small owl that breeds in tropical Asia, from mainland India to Southeast Asia. A common resident of open habitats, farmland and human habitation, it has adapted to living in cities as well. It is often found near human habitation. The species shows great variation, including clinal variation, in size, and forms a superspecies with the very similar Little Owl. It generally roosts in a small group in the hollows of trees or in cavities in rocks or buildings. Nesting is usually in a hole in a tree or building, laying 3–5 eggs.

Spotted Owlet

Spotted Owlet at the nest

Late last year (2019), I was fortunate to locate and observe a family of Spotted Owlets near my farm in Aziznagar. The Owlets resided in an open well. There were four in number, probably the parents and two young (now almost adult). The young were born and nurtured in the small cavity in the wall of the open well, and I had opportunity to observe them regularly.

Spotted Owlet

There are many other birds seen in the vicinity of the farm. Some other photos taken in the area:

Red Avadavat

Black Drongo

Southern Coucal

Pied Bushchat

Spotted Dove

Shikra

Green Bee-eater

* * *

Bird of the Month

Text and Photos: Umesh Mani

Slender-billed Gull (*Chroicocephalus genei*)

Slender-billed Gull breeding (L) and non-breeding (R) (Jamnagar, Gujarat, February 8 & 9, 2019)

Order: Charadriiformes
Family: Laridae
Genus: *Chroicocephalus*
Species: *C. genei*
Size: 37-40 cm

Description & distribution: The Slender-billed Gull, also sometimes referred to as the Rosy Gull, is a mid-sized gull that breeds in the Mediterranean region, and in the countries bordering the north-western part of the Indian Ocean, e.g. Pakistan. It winters further south, in north Africa, India and western parts of Europe. It has a white head, neck, breast and underparts, lower rump and tail, and pale grey upperparts, with the wings showing black-tipped primaries. The neck appears long, forehead is sloping, and the bill is elongated, tapering and red in colour. Irises are yellow, and legs are bright red or dark red. It has a faint dusky ear-spot, much like the Black-headed Gull, but during breeding season, the head becomes clean white; the bill becomes darker red, and the breast and underparts may also develop a pinkish flush. First-year immature birds show a dark terminal tail band and darker areas on the wings.

Habitat & behaviour: The Slender-billed Gull frequents lakes, lagoons, bays, tidal pools, estuaries and marshes, as well as artificial habitats like salt pans and aquaculture ponds. It is usually seen singly, in pairs, or in small flocks, and usually in association with the much commoner Black-headed Gull; the flock size increases during feeding and roosting. Feeding occurs mostly in marshes, grasslands and deltas, although it is also known to feed at landfills and garbage disposal sites. Like many gulls, it tends to stay on the coast and does not venture far into the sea. Its diet consists largely of fish, although it often feeds on aquatic invertebrates at the mudflats, as well as insects that it catches on the wing. It often feeds by flying a few metres above the water and diving when it spots a fish. Its call is a sharp *ka ka ka* or a *kra kra kra*.

Nesting: The Slender-billed Gull breeds generally between March and May in most of its breeding range. It nests in large colonies, numbering sometimes up to several thousand pairs. The nest is a shallow scrape or natural depression in the ground, sparsely lined with feathers, grass or other vegetation. The usual clutch consists of 3 spotted, pale buff eggs.

Local name: The Slender-billed Gull is known as *'Kal-siri gangachilli'* in Hindi and '*Gulabi dhomdo'* or *'Vadhomadi'* in Gujarati.

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